

10

Is the Gift of Tongues for Today?

Someone sent me a sample of some charismatic Sunday school literature designed to teach kindergarten children to speak in tongues. It is titled "I've Been Filled with the Holy Spirit!!!" and is an eight-page coloring book. One page has a caricature of a smiling weight-lifter with a T-shirt that says "Spirit-Man." Under him is printed 1 Corinthians 14:4: "He that speaks in an unknown tongue builds himself up."

Another page features a boy who looks like Howdy Doody with his hands lifted up. A dotted outline pictures where his lungs would be. (This evidently represents his spirit.) Inside the lung-shaped diagram is printed "BAH-LE ODOMA TA LAH-SE-TA NO-MO." A cartoon-style balloon coming from his mouth repeats the words, "BAH-LE ODOMA-TA LAH-SE-TA NO-MO." A brain-shaped cloud is drawn in his head, with a large question mark in the cloud. Also inside the cloud is printed, "MY MIND DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M SAYING." Under the boy 1 Corinthians 14:14 is printed: "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful."

That expresses the typical charismatic perspective. The gift of tongues is viewed as a wholly mystical ability that somehow operates in a person's spirit but utterly bypasses the mind. Many charismatics are even told that they must purposefully switch off their minds to enable the gift to function. Charles and Frances Hunter, for example, hold "Healing Explosion" meetings, attended by as many as fifty thousand people at a time. At those seminars the Hunters "teach" people how to receive the gift of tongues. Charles Hunter tells people,

When you pray with your spirit, you do not think of the sounds of the language. Just trust God, but make the sounds when I tell you to.

In just a moment when I tell you to, begin loving and praising God by speaking forth a lot of different syllable sounds. At first make the sounds rapidly so you won't try to think as you do in speaking your natural language. . . . Make the sounds loudly at first so you can easily hear what you are saying.¹

Hunter does not explain what point there is in *hearing* what one is saying, since the mind is supposed to be disengaged anyway. He continually reminds his audience that they are not supposed to be thinking: "The reason some of you don't speak fluently is that you tried to think of the sounds. So when we pray this prayer and you start speaking in your heavenly language, don't try to think."² Later, he adds, "[You] don't even have to think in order to pray in the Spirit."³

Arthur L. Johnson, in his excellent exposé of mysticism, calls the charismatic movement "the zenith of mysticism"⁴—and with good reason. This desire to switch off the mind and disconnect from all that is rational was, as we noted previously (see chapter 7), one of the primary characteristics of the pagan mystery religions. Nearly all the teachings distinctive to the charismatic movement are unadulterated mysticism, and nothing illustrates that more perfectly than the way charismatics themselves depict the gift of tongues.

Charismatics typically describe tongues as an ecstatic experience without parallel that arouses the spirit in a way that must be experienced to be appreciated. One author quotes Robert V. Morris:

For me . . . the gift of tongues turned out to be the gift of praise. As I used the unknown language which God had given me I felt rising in me the love, the awe, the adoration pure and uncontenting, that I had not been able to achieve in thought-out prayer.⁵

A newspaper article on tongues quoted the Reverend Bill L. Williams, of San Jose:

"It involves you with someone you're deeply in love with and devoted to. . . . We don't understand the verbiage, but we know we're in communication."

¹Charles Hunter, "Receiving the Baptism with the Holy Spirit," *Charisma* (July 1989), 54.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Arthur L. Johnson, *Faith Misguided: Exposing the Dangers of Mysticism* (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 113.

⁵John L. Sherrill, *They Speak with Other Tongues* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Spire, 1964), 83.

That awareness is "beyond emotion, beyond intellect," he said. "It transcends human understanding. It is the heart of man speaking to the heart of God. It is deep, inner heart understanding."

"It comes as supernatural utterances, bringing intimacy with God."⁶

The article also quoted the Reverend Billy Martin, of Farmington New Mexico: "It's a joyous, glorious, wonderful experience." And the Reverend Darlene Miller, of Knoxville, Tennessee: "It's like the sweetness of peaches that you can't know until you taste it yourself. There[']s nothing ever to compare with that taste."⁷ Other tongues speakers would echo sentiments similar to those.

And what could possibly be wrong with such an experience? If it makes a person *feel* good, closer to God, spiritually stronger, or even delirious with joy, can it in any way be dangerous or deceptive?

It can, and it is. The late George Gardiner, a pastor and former tongues-speaker who left the Pentecostal movement, poignantly described the danger of surrendering one's mind and abandoning control of oneself for the sake of the euphoria of a tongues experience:

The enemy of the soul is ever ready to take an advantage of an "out of control" situation and thousands of Christians can testify with regret to the end results.

Such experiences not only give Satan an opening he is quick to exploit, they can be psychologically damaging to the individual. Charismatic writers are constantly warning tongues-speakers that they will suffer a letdown. This is ascribed to the devil and the reader is urged to get refilled as soon as possible. . . .

So the seeker for experience goes back through the ritual again and again, but begins to discover something; ecstatic experience, like drug-addiction, requires larger and larger doses to satisfy. Sometimes the bizarre is introduced. I have seen people run around a room until they were exhausted, climb tent poles, laugh hysterically, go into trances for days and do other weird things as the "high" sought became more elusive. Eventually there is a crisis and a decision is made; he will sit on the back seats and be a spectator, "fake it," or go on in the hope that everything will eventually be as it was. The most tragic decision is to quit and in the quitting abandon all things spiritual as fraudulent. The spectators are frustrated, the fakers suffer guilt, the hoping are pitiable and the quitters are a tragedy. No, such movements are not harmless!⁸

⁶"Speaking in Tongues—Believers Relish the Experience," *Los Angeles Times* (September 19, 1987), B2.

⁷Ibid.

⁸George E. Gardiner, *The Corinthian Catastrophe* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1974), 55.

Many who speak in tongues will understand the tensions Gardiner has described. He is not the only tongues-speaker to turn against the practice and expose its dangers. Wayne Robinson, who served as editor-in-chief of publications in the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, was an enthusiastic tongues-speaker at one time. In the preface of his book *I Once Spoke in Tongues*, he wrote:

In the past few years, I have become more and more convinced that *the* test, not *only* of tongues but of any religious experience, cannot be limited to the logic and truthfulness supporting it. There is also the essential question, "*What does it do in one's life?*" More specifically, does it turn a person inward to self-concern and selfish interests, or does it open him up to others and to their needs?

I know people who testify that speaking in tongues has been the great liberating experience of their lives. But juxtaposed with them are a great many others for whom speaking in tongues has been an excuse to withdraw from confronting the realities of a suffering and divided world. For some, tongues has been the greatest thing ever to happen; others have seen it disrupt churches, destroy careers, and rupture personal relationships.⁹

Ben Byrd, another former charismatic, writes,

To say that speaking in tongues is a harmless practice and is all right for those who want to IS AN UNWISE position when information to the contrary is evident. . . . Speaking in tongues is addictive. The misunderstanding of the issue of tongues and the habit plus the psychic high it brings plus the stimulation of the flesh equals a practice hard to let go of. . . . [But to] equate much speaking in tongues with advanced spirituality is to reveal one's misunderstanding of Bible Truth and to reveal one's willingness to be satisfied with a deceptive and dangerous counterfeit.¹⁰

Others who practice tongues can turn the phenomenon on and off mechanically, without feeling anything emotional. Having learned the familiar sounds to repeat, they have honed the ability and can speak fluently and effortlessly—yet dispassionately.

⁹Wayne Robinson, *I Once Spoke in Tongues* (Atlanta: Forum House, 1973), 9–10.

¹⁰Ben Byrd, *The Truth About Speaking in Tongues*, (Columbus, Ga.: Brentwood, 1988), 49 (emphasis in original).

The Biblical Gift of Tongues

Tongues are mentioned in three books of the Bible: Mark (16:17); Acts (2, 10, 19); and 1 Corinthians (12–14).¹¹ In chapter 8 of this book we looked at the Acts passages, noting that Acts is primarily historical narrative and the extraordinary, miraculous events it recounts do not represent a normative pattern for the entire church age. The disputed text of Mark 16:17 simply mentions tongues as an apostolic sign (see chapter 4). That leaves 1 Corinthians 12–14, the only passage of Scripture that talks about the role of tongues in the church. Note that Paul wrote those chapters to reprove the Corinthians for their *misuse* of the gift. Most of what he had to say *restricted* the use of tongues in the church.¹²

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul discussed spiritual gifts in general, how they are received, and how God has ordered the gifts in the church. In the fourteenth chapter of that book he demonstrated the inferiority of tongues to prophecy. There he also gave guidelines for the proper exercise of the gifts of tongues and interpretation.¹³ Right in the

¹¹Some charismatics point to Romans 8:26–27 as another New Testament reference to tongues: “We do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Regarding that passage Kenneth Hagin has written: “P. C. Nelson, a scholar of the Greek, said that the Greek literally reads here, ‘The Holy Ghost maketh intercession for us in groanings that cannot be uttered in articulate speech.’ Articulate speech means our regular kind of speech. He went on to point out how the Greek stresses that this not only includes groanings escaping our lips in prayer, but also praying in other tongues.” [Kenneth E. Hagin, “Why Tongues” (Tulsa: Faith Library, 1975), 19.]

That is a tortured interpretation of the passage and an unscholarly handling of the Greek text. Nothing in the Greek suggests the idea of praying in tongues; Nelson and Hagin are reading it in. Even if inarticulate speech could be read into this term, that does not correspond to the New Testament description of the gift of tongues. “Groanings,” however, is accurate. The word is *stenazō*. A standard New Testament dictionary says, “Paul uses the term exclusively in the sense of sighing in the sense of longing for something.” [Thomas McComiskey, “*Stenazō*,” Colin Brown, ed. *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 425.]

¹²For a detailed exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14 see John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody, 1984).

¹³Paul Van Gorder offered this list of limitations on the use of tongues in the church from 1 Corinthians 14:

1. Tongues were for a sign to unbelievers (verse 22).
2. Tongues were to be used for the edification of the church (verse 26).
3. No more than three people in the assembly were to speak in tongues during a service, and then, each in his turn (verse 27).

middle of those two chapters—in 1 Corinthians 13—Paul discussed the proper motive for using the gifts—namely, love. Usually dealt with apart from its context, 1 Corinthians 13 has been called a hymn of love. It is undeniably a supreme literary achievement, and it deals profoundly and beautifully with the subject of genuine love. But it is helpful to remember that it is first of all a crucial point in Paul’s discussion of the adulteration of tongues.

In 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 Paul affirms the preeminence of love. Verse 1 plainly states that miraculous languages without love are nothing. Paul was rebuking the Corinthians for using gifts of the Spirit selfishly and without love. They were more interested in inflating their own egos or in enjoying a euphoric experience than they were in serving one another with the self-sacrificing concern that characterizes *agapē* love.

“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels . . .” is how Paul begins the chapter. “Tongues” is from the Greek word *glōssa*, which, like our word *tongue*, can refer either to the physical organ or to a language. Paul is clearly referring to a gift of *languages*. Note that Paul had personally spoken in tongues (1 Cor. 14:18). He was not condemning the practice itself; he was saying that if the gift of tongues is used in any other way than God intended, it is only noise—like the rhythm band in a kindergarten class.

Are Tongues a Heavenly Language?

What did Paul mean by the “tongues of . . . angels?” Many believe Paul was suggesting that the gift of tongues involves some kind of angelic or heavenly language. Indeed, most charismatics believe that the gift of tongues is a private prayer language, a heavenly language known only to God, celestial speech, or some other kind of unearthly idiom. There is no warrant in the text itself for such a view, however.

4. There was to be no speaking in tongues unless they should be interpreted (verse 28).

5. Any confusion or disorder in the assembly was an indication of something that did not originate from God (verse 33).

6. In the apostolic church, women were to keep silent and not to speak in tongues (verse 34).

7. To recognize these regulations as the commandments of the Lord was imperative (verse 37).

8. Though not forbidding tongues in the apostolic assembly, the predominant command was “covet to prophesy” (verse 39).

Most contemporary charismatics violate every one of the apostle’s guidelines. [Paul R. Van Gorder, “Charismatic Confusion” (Grand Rapids: Radio Bible Class, 1972), 33.]

Paul was making a hypothetical case,¹⁴ just as in the subsequent verses, where he speaks about knowing all mysteries and knowledge (even Paul could not literally make that claim), giving all his possessions to the poor, and giving his body to be burned. Paul was speaking theoretically, suggesting that even if those things *were* true, without love they would be meaningless. To make his point about the necessity for love, Paul was trying to stretch his examples to the outer limits.

Besides, there is no evidence in Scripture that angels use a heavenly language. Whenever angels appear in Scripture, they communicate in normal human language (e.g., Luke 1:11–20, 26–37; 2:8–14).

Nowhere does the Bible teach that the gift of tongues is anything other than human languages. Nor is there any suggestion that the true tongues described in 1 Corinthians 12–14 were materially different from the miraculous languages described in Acts 2 at Pentecost. The Greek word in both places is *glōssa*. In Acts it is clear that the disciples were speaking in *known* languages. Unbelieving Jews who were in Jerusalem at the time “were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language” (2:6). Luke went on to name some fifteen different countries and areas whose languages were being spoken (vv. 8–11).

Furthermore, the Greek word *dialektos*, from which we get the English word “dialect,” is also used in reference to the languages in Acts 2:6, 8. Unbelievers present at Pentecost heard God’s message proclaimed in their own local dialects. Such a description could not apply to ecstatic speech.

Many charismatics point out that the King James Version of 1 Corinthians 14 repeatedly uses the expression “an unknown tongue.” That, they say, describes a language that is not of this world. The word *unknown*, however, was supplied by translators and does not appear in the Greek text.¹⁵ That is why the King James Version

¹⁴The Greek verbs in 1 Corinthians 13:2–3 are subjunctive. The subjunctive mood is used to indicate the imaginary or a situation contrary to fact. A standard Greek grammar explains, “While the indicative assumes reality, the subjunctive assumes unreality. It is the first step away from that which is actual in the direction of that which is only conceivable” [H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957), 170.]

¹⁵*Glōssa* always appears in the plural form throughout Acts, indicating multiple languages. In 1 Corinthians 14, however, Paul employed both the singular and plural forms. One possible explanation is that when he used the singular “tongue” in verses 2, 4, 13, 14, and 19, he was referring to the counterfeit pagan babbling that some of the Corinthian believers were evidently using instead of the true gift of languages. Meaningless, ecstatic speech was fundamentally all the same, so the plural form was unnecessary. When Paul was clearly referring to the

shows the word in italics. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 13:1 cannot be used to prove that Paul is advocating meaningless, ecstatic speech or some kind of heavenly or angelic language.

Moreover, Paul insisted that when tongues were spoken in the church, someone should interpret (14:13, 27). Such a command would not be apropos if Paul had in mind the ecstatic babbling of “private” prayer language or spontaneous celestial sounds. The Greek word for interpretation is *hermeneuō*, which means “translation.” (It is so used in John 9:7 and Heb. 7:2.) The gift of interpretation was a supernatural ability to translate a language one had never learned so that others might be edified by the message (1 Cor. 14:5). You cannot translate ecstatic speech or gibberish.

Still another indication that Paul had in mind human languages is his statement in 1 Corinthians 14:21–22 that tongues were given as a sign to unbelieving Israel: “In the Law it is written, ‘By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me,’ says the Lord.” Paul was referring to Isaiah 28:11–12, a prophecy telling the nation of Israel that God would speak his revelation in Gentile languages. That was a rebuke to Israel in their unbelief. In order to be a meaningful sign, these must have been Gentile foreign languages, not some kind of angelic speech.

Counterfeit Tongues

Clearly, true biblical tongues are not gibberish, but languages. What passes for tongues in the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, however, are not true languages. Modern tongues-speaking, often called *glossolalia*, is not the same thing as the biblical gift of languages. William Samarin, professor of linguistics at the University of Toronto, wrote:

Over a period of five years I have taken part in meetings in Italy, Holland, Jamaica, Canada, and the United States. I have observed old-fashioned Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals; I have been in small meetings at private homes as well as in mammoth public meetings; I

authentic gift of languages, however, he used the plural “tongues.” The only exception is 1 Corinthians 14:27, where Paul describes one man speaking one language, so the singular “tongue” was necessary there, too.

The KJV supplies the word *unknown* only where the form of *glōssa* is singular. If this differentiation between the singular “tongue” and the plural “tongues” signifies the difference between a real language and mere gibberish, perhaps the King James translators were correct to supply the term after all. Thus understood, the “unknown tongue” is not a manifestation of the true spiritual gift but a pagan corruption.

have seen such different cultural settings as are found among the Puerto Ricans of the Bronx, the snake handlers of the Appalachians [and] Russian Molakans in Los Angeles. . . . Glossolalia is indeed like language in some ways, but this is only because the speaker (unconsciously) wants it to be like language. Yet in spite of superficial similarities, glossolalia is fundamentally *not* language.¹⁶

William Samarin is one of many men who have made studies of glossolalia. The studies all agree that what we are hearing today is not language; and if it is not language, then it is not the biblical gift of tongues.

As we have seen (chapter 7), the mystery religions in and around Corinth in the first century made wide use of ecstatic speech and trancelike experiences. It seems some of the Corinthians had corrupted the gift of tongues by using the ecstatic counterfeit. What they were doing was very similar to modern-day glossolalia. Paul was trying to correct them by telling them that such practices circumvented the whole point of the gift of tongues. If they used tongues that way, they would do harm and not good for the cause of Christ.

The Abuse of Tongues at Corinth

Note that in 1 Corinthians 14:2 Paul was *criticizing* the Corinthians for using their "gift of tongues" to speak to God and not to men: "One who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries."¹⁷ Paul's comment is not suggesting that tongues should be used as a "prayer language"; he was using irony, pointing out the futility of speaking in tongues without an interpreter, because only God would know if anything was said. Spiritual gifts were never intended to be used for God's benefit, or for the benefit of the gifted individual. Peter made that clear in 1 Peter 4:10: "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another."

Paul further added in 1 Corinthians 14:4, "One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but one who prophesies edifies the church." Again, Paul was not commending the use of tongues for self-edification, but condemning people who were using the gift in violation of its purpose and in disregard of the principle of love

¹⁶William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), xii, 227. For an expansion of that claim, see pp. 103–28.

¹⁷Because of the absence of any definite article in the Greek text, it is also possible to translate this verse as, "One who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to a god"—referring to a pagan deity. Either way, 1 Corinthians 14:2 is condemnation, not commendation. The context demands that.

("[Love] does not seek its own."—1 Cor. 13:5). The word "edify" in 14:4 means "to build up." It might carry either a positive or a negative connotation, depending on the context.¹⁸ The Corinthians were using tongues to build themselves up in a selfish sense. Their motives were not wholesome but egocentric. Their passion for tongues grew out of a desire to exercise the most spectacular, showy gifts in front of other believers. Paul's point was that no one profits from such an exhibition except the person speaking in tongues—and the chief value he gets out of it is the building of his own ego. In 1 Corinthians 10:24 Paul had already made clear this principle: "Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor."

Tongues posed another problem: used as they were in Corinth, they obscured rather than clarified the message they were intended to convey. In 1 Corinthians 14:16–17, Paul wrote, "If you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified." In other words, the tongues-speakers in Corinth were being selfish, ignoring the rest of the people in the congregation, muddying the message the gift was designed to communicate, and doing it all just to gratify their own egos, to show off, and to demonstrate their spirituality to one another.

In light of all that, we might wonder about Paul's apparent command in 1 Corinthians 12:31: "But earnestly desire the greater gifts." The way that verse is usually translated presents some serious interpretive problems. Since Paul stresses God's sovereignty in distributing the gifts, and he writes to castigate the Corinthians for favoring the showy gifts, why would he command them to seek "the greater" gifts? Wouldn't that just encourage them to continue competing for status?

But in fact the verse is not actually a command at all. The English translation is misleading as to Paul's meaning. The verb form used here can be either indicative (a statement of fact) or imperative (a command). The indicative form makes better sense. The *New International Version* offers the indicative as an alternate reading: "But you are eagerly desiring the greater gifts." Albert Barnes takes the indicative view, pointing out that many of his fellow commentators in the mid-nineteenth century (Dodridge, Locke, and MacKnight) did likewise. Barnes observes that the Syriac New Testament

¹⁸In 1 Corinthians 8:10, for example, the same Greek word is used to speak of "strengthening" someone's conscience to do evil.

renders the verse, "Because you are zealous of the best gifts, I will show to you a more excellent way."¹⁹

In other words, Paul was actually saying, "But you are jealously coveting the showy gifts." That is a rebuke, which makes better sense of Paul's next words: "I show you a still more excellent way." He is not commanding them to seek certain gifts, but condemning them for seeking the showy ones. The "more excellent way" he speaks of is the way of love he then goes on to describe in 1 Corinthians 13.

The Corinthians were selfishly seeking the most prominent, most ostentatious, most celebrated gifts. They coveted others' admiration. They craved the applause of men. They desired to be seen as "spiritual." Evidently, people had even gone to the extreme of using counterfeit tongues. The abuse of tongues in Corinth was threatening that church.

Sadly, the very same problems are threatening the church today.

Tongues Will Cease

In 1 Corinthians 13:8 Paul made an interesting, almost startling, statement: "Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away." In the expression "love never fails," the Greek word translated "fails" means "to decay" or "to be abolished." Paul was not saying that love is invincible or that it cannot be rejected. He was saying that love is eternal—that it will be applicable forever and will never be passé.

Tongues, however, "will cease." The Greek verb used in 1 Corinthians 13:8 (*pauō*) means "to cease permanently." It implies that when tongues ceased, they would never start up again.²⁰

¹⁹Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975 reprint), 240. Charismatic commentator Gordon Fee acknowledges the legitimacy of the indicative view [Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 624.] Fee also gives the following list of scholars who support that view: Arnold Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces, A Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 73–75; Ralph P. Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation: Studies in 1 Corinthians 12–15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 34–35; D.L. Baker, "The Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12–14," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 226–27; G. Iber, "Zum Verständnis von 1 Cor. 12:31," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 54 (1963): 42–52; M.A. Chevallier, *Esprit de Dieu, Paroles d'Hommes* (Neuchâtel, 1963): 158–63.

²⁰The passage does not say *when* tongues were to cease. Some commentators believe verse 10 sets the timing: "When the perfect comes, the partial will be done away." Many suggestions have been made as to the meaning of "the perfect." Some believe it is the complete New Testament; thus they conclude this

Here is the problem this passage poses for the contemporary charismatic movement: if tongues were supposed to cease, has that already happened, or is it yet future? Charismatic brothers in Christ insist that none of the gifts have ceased yet, so the cessation of tongues is yet future. Most non-charismatics insist that tongues have already ceased, passing away with the apostolic age.

Who is right?

I am convinced by history, theology, and the Bible that tongues ceased in the apostolic age. And when it happened, they terminated altogether. The contemporary charismatic movement does not represent a revival of biblical tongues. It is an aberration similar to the practice of counterfeit tongues at Corinth.

What evidence is there that tongues have ceased? First, tongues was a miraculous, revelatory gift, and as we have noted repeatedly, the age of miracles and revelation ended with the apostles. The last recorded miracles in the New Testament occurred around A.D. 58, with the healings on the island of Malta (Acts 28:7–10). From A.D. 58 to 96, when John finished the book of Revelation, no miracle is recorded. Miracle gifts like tongues and healing are mentioned only in 1 Corinthians, an early epistle. Two later epistles, Ephesians and Romans, both discuss gifts of the Spirit at length—but no mention is made of the miraculous gifts. By that time miracles were already looked on as something in the past (Heb. 2:3–4). Apostolic authority and the apostolic message needed no further confirmation. Before the first century ended, all the New Testament had been written and was circulating through the churches. The revelatory gifts had ceased to serve any purpose. And when the apostolic age ended with the death

passage is saying that tongues would cease when the canon was closed. Various others say the perfect thing is the maturing of the church, the rapture, or the second coming. But it seems that the perfect thing Paul has in mind must be the eternal state—"face to face" in verse 12 can best be explained as being with God in the new heavens and new earth. It is only in glory that we will know as we are known (v. 12).

The language of the passage puts tongues in a category apart from prophecy and knowledge. Verse 8 says prophecy and knowledge will be "done away" (*Gk.*, *katargeō*), but tongues "will cease" (*pauō*, "stop"). *Katargeō* appears as a passive verb, meaning that the subject of the sentence receives the action: Prophecy and knowledge will be "done away" by "the perfect." *Pauō*, however, appears in the Greek middle voice, which here seems to signify a reflexive action: The gift of tongues will "stop itself." *When* is not stipulated, but they won't be around when the perfect thing arrives. History suggests that tongues ceased shortly after Paul wrote this epistle, as we shall see in the following pages.

Incidentally, knowledge and prophecy need not be understood in this context exclusively as miraculous or revelatory gifts. The non-revelatory gifts of knowledge (the ability to grasp the meaning of God's revelation) and prophecy (the ability to proclaim truth powerfully) continue today and will not pass away until the ultimate perfection of the eternal state causes them to be "done away."

of the apostle John, the signs that identified the apostles had already become moot (cf. 2 Cor. 12:12).

Second, as we noted, tongues were intended as a sign to unbelieving Israel. They signified that God had begun a new work that encompassed the Gentiles. The Lord would now speak to all nations in all languages. The barriers were down. And so the gift of languages symbolized not only the curse of God on a disobedient nation, but also the blessing of God on the whole world.

Tongues were therefore a sign of transition between the Old and New Covenants. With the establishment of the church, a new day had dawned for the people of God. God would speak in all languages. But once the period of transition was past, the sign was no longer necessary. O. Palmer Robertson aptly articulated the consequence of that:

Tongues served well to show that Christianity, though begun in the cradle of Judaism, was not to be distinctively Jewish. . . . Now that the transition [between Old and New Covenants] has been made, the sign of transition has no abiding value in the life of the church.

Today there is no need for a sign to show that God is moving from the single nation of Israel to all the nations. That movement has become an accomplished fact. As in the case of the founding office of apostle, so the particularly transitional gift of tongues has fulfilled its function as covenantal sign for the Old and New Covenant people of God. Once having fulfilled that role, it has no further function among the people of God.²¹

Moreover, the gift of tongues was inferior to other gifts. It was given primarily as a sign (1 Cor. 14:22) and cannot edify the church in a proper way. It is also easily misused to edify self (14:4). The church meets for the edification of the body, not self-gratification or personal experience-seeking. Therefore, tongues had limited usefulness in the church, and so it was never intended to be a permanent gift.

History records that tongues did cease.²² Again, it is significant that tongues are mentioned only in the earliest books of the New Testament. Paul wrote at least twelve epistles after 1 Corinthians and never mentioned tongues again. Peter never mentioned tongues;

²¹O. Palmer Robertson, "Tongues: Sign of Covenantal Curse and Blessing," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (Fall 1975–Spring 1976): 53.

²²For helpful discussions of the historical evidence for the cessation of tongues, see Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967); Victor Budgen, *The Charismatics and the Word of God* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1989); Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1983).

James never mentioned tongues; John never mentioned tongues; neither did Jude. Tongues appeared only briefly in Acts and 1 Corinthians as the new message of the gospel was being spread. But once the church was established, tongues were gone. They stopped. The later books of the New Testament do not mention tongues again. Nor did anyone in the post-apostolic age. Cleon Rogers wrote, "It is significant that the gift of tongues is nowhere alluded to, hinted at or even found in the Apostolic Fathers."²³

Chrysostom and Augustine—the greatest theologians of the eastern and western churches—considered tongues obsolete. Chrysostom stated categorically that tongues had ceased by his time. Writing in the fourth century, he described tongues as an obscure practice, admitting that he was not even certain about the characteristics of the gift. "The obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place," he wrote.²⁴

Augustine wrote of tongues as a sign that was adapted to the apostolic age:

In the earliest times, "the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spake with tongues," which they had not learned, "as the Spirit gave them utterance." *These were signs adapted to the time.* For there behooved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to shew that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. *That thing was done for a betokening, and it passed away.* In the laying on of hands now, that persons may receive the Holy Ghost, do we look that they should speak with tongues? [To this rhetorical question Augustine obviously anticipated a negative reply.] . . . If then the witness of the presence of the Holy Ghost be not now given through these miracles, by what is it given, by what does one get to know that he has received the Holy Ghost? Let him question his own heart. If he love his brother, the Spirit of God dwelleth in him.²⁵

Augustine also wrote,

How then, brethren, because he that is baptized in Christ, and believes on Him, does not now speak in the tongues of all nations, are we not to believe that he has received the Holy Ghost? God forbid that our heart should be tempted by this faithlessness. . . . Why is it that no man

²³Cleon L. Rogers, "The Gift of Tongues in the Post-Apostolic Church," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122 (April–June 1965): 134.

²⁴Chrysostom, "Homilies in First Corinthians," Philip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 168.

²⁵Augustine, "Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John," Philip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 107 (emphasis added).

speaks in the tongues of all nations? Because the Church itself now speaks in the tongues of all nations. Before, the Church was in one nation, where it spoke in the tongues of all. By speaking then in the tongues of all, it signified what was to come to pass; that by growing among the nations, it would speak in the tongues of all.²⁶

During the first five hundred years of the church, the only people who claimed to have spoken in tongues were followers of Montanus, who was branded a heretic (see chapter 3).

The next time any significant tongues-speaking movement arose within Christianity was in the late seventeenth century. A group of militant Protestants in the Cevennes region of southern France began to prophesy, experience visions, and speak in tongues. The group, sometimes called the Cevennol prophets, are remembered for their political and military activities, not their spiritual legacy. Most of their prophecies went unfulfilled. They were rabidly anti-Catholic, and advocated the use of armed force against the Catholic church. Many of them were consequently persecuted and killed by Rome.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Jansenists, a group of Roman Catholic loyalists who opposed the Reformers' teaching on justification by faith, also claimed to be able to speak in tongues in the 1700s.

Another group that practiced a form of tongues was the Shakers, an American sect with Quaker roots that flourished in the mid-1700s. Mother Ann Lee, founder of the sect, regarded herself as the female equivalent of Jesus Christ. She claimed to be able to speak in seventy-two languages. The Shakers believed sexual intercourse was sinful, even within marriage. They spoke in tongues while dancing and singing in a trancelike state.

Then in the early nineteenth century, Scottish Presbyterian pastor Edward Irving and members of his congregation practiced speaking in tongues and prophesying. Irvingite prophets often contradicted each other, their prophecies failed to come to pass, and their meetings were characterized by wild excesses. The movement was further discredited when some of their prophets admitted to falsifying prophecies and others even attributed their "giftedness" to evil spirits. This group eventually became the Catholic Apostolic Church, which taught many false doctrines, embracing several Roman Catholic doctrines and creating twelve apostolic offices.

All of those supposed manifestations of tongues were identified with groups that were heretical, fanatical, or otherwise unorthodox. The judgment of biblically orthodox believers who were their

²⁶Augustine, "Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John," *Ibid.*, 195.

contemporaries was that all those groups were aberrations. Surely that should also be the assessment of any Christian who is concerned with truth. Thus we conclude that from the end of the apostolic era to the beginning of the twentieth century there were no genuine occurrences of the New Testament gift of tongues. They had ceased, as the Holy Spirit said they would (1 Cor. 13:8).

New Testament scholar Thomas R. Edgar makes this observation:

Since these gifts and signs did cease, the burden of proof is entirely on the charismatics to prove their validity. Too long Christians have assumed that the noncharismatic must produce incontestable biblical evidence that the miraculous sign gifts did cease. However, noncharismatics have no burden to prove this, since it has already been proved by history. It is an irrefutable fact admitted by many Pentecostals. Therefore the charismatics must prove biblically that the sign gifts will start up again during the Church Age and that today's phenomena are this reoccurrence. In other words they must prove that their experiences are the reoccurrence of gifts that have not occurred for almost 1,900 years.²⁷

A Final Outpouring?

Has the gift of tongues resumed in the twentieth century? Pentecostals and charismatics treat that question in one of two ways. Some claim that the gift never ceased—it just declined—and therefore the groups who claimed to speak in tongues were forerunners of those contemporary Pentecostal and charismatic movements.²⁸ In taking that position they put themselves in a heretical tradition.

On the other hand, many charismatics concede that tongues *did* cease after the apostolic era, but they believe the contemporary manifestations of the charismata are a final outpouring of the Spirit and his gifts for the last days.

A key text for Pentecostals and charismatics who take this second view is Joel 2:28: "It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy and your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions."

According to Joel 2:19–32, before the final Day of the Lord, God's Spirit will be poured out in such a way that there will be wonders in the sky, and on the earth—blood, fire, and columns of smoke: "The

²⁷Thomas R. Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (October–December 1988), 374.

²⁸John Wimber, for example, takes this position. See John Wimber, *A Brief Sketch of Signs and Wonders Through the Church Age* (Placentia, Calif.: The Vineyard, 1984), 41–46.

sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes" (v. 31). That is obviously a prophecy of the coming millennial kingdom and cannot refer to anything earlier. The context of the Joel passage makes this the only plausible interpretation.

For example, Joel 2:20 refers to the defeat of "the northern army" that will attack Israel in the end-time apocalypse. Verse 27 of Joel speaks of the great revival that will bring Israel back to God. That is another feature of the Great Tribulation and is not yet fulfilled. Joel 3 (vv. 2, 12, 14) describes the judgment of the nations, an event that comes after Armageddon and in connection with the establishment of the earthly, millennial kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Later in chapter 3, Joel gives a beautiful description of the millennial kingdom (v. 18). Clearly, Joel 2 is a kingdom prophecy, which was not completely fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2) or on any occasion since. It must refer to an era that is still future.

There is still, however, the question of what Peter meant when he quoted Joel 2:28–32 on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17–21). Some Bible teachers say that Peter was pointing to Pentecost as a fulfillment of Joel 2:28. But on the day of Pentecost there were no wonders in the heavens and signs in the earth; no blood and fire and vapors of smoke; the sun did not turn to darkness and the moon to blood and the great and terrible day of the Lord did not come. The prophecy was not fully realized; Pentecost was only a partial fulfillment, or better, a preview of the prophecy's ultimate culmination. The parallel to that is the Transfiguration, in which our Lord's glory was briefly revealed as it will be seen fully throughout the millennial kingdom.

Peter was simply telling those present at Pentecost that they were getting a preliminary glimpse, a projection of the kind of power that the Spirit would release in the millennial kingdom. What they were seeing in Jerusalem among a handful of people was a sign of what God's Spirit would someday do on a worldwide basis.

One of the fine Bible scholars of the nineteenth century, George N. H. Peters, wrote, "The Baptism of Pentecost is a *pledge* of fulfillment in the future, *evidencing* what the Holy Ghost will *yet perform* in the coming age."²⁹ The miracles that began on the day of Pentecost are light on the horizon, heralding the coming earthly kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Some charismatics spiritualize "the former rain and the latter rain" of Joel 2:23 (KJV). They argue that the former rain refers to Pentecost,

²⁹George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1972), 66 (emphasis in original).

when the Spirit came, and the latter rain to his outpouring in the twentieth century.

Throughout the Old Testament, "the former rain" refers to the autumn rains and "the latter rain" to the spring rains. Joel was actually saying that in the millennial kingdom both rains will come "as before"³⁰ (v. 23). His point was that God will make crops grow profusely in the kingdom. Joel 2:24–26 makes that abundantly clear: "And the threshing floors will be full of grain, and the vats will overflow with the new wine and oil. Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust, and the gnawing locust, My great army which I sent among you. And you shall have plenty to eat and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; then My people will never be put to shame."

The "former and latter rain," then, have nothing to do with Pentecost, the twentieth century, or the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals and charismatics cannot use Joel 2:28 as a basis for saying tongues have been poured out a second time. In the first place, Joel did not even mention tongues. In the second place, the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was not the ultimate fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

Thomas Edgar makes this significant observation:

There is no biblical evidence that there will be a reoccurrence in the church of the sign gifts or that believers will work miracles near the end of the Church age. However, there is ample evidence that near the end of the age there will be false prophets who perform miracles, prophesy, and cast out demons in Jesus' name (cf. Matt. 7:22–23; 24:11, 24; 2 Thess. 2:9–12).³¹

We do well to be on guard.

What Kind of Tongues Are Being Spoken Today?

How are we to explain the charismatic experience? Countless charismatics testify that speaking in tongues has enriched their lives. For example:

"What's the *use* of speaking in tongues?" The only way I can answer that is to say, "What's the use of a bluebird? What is the use of a sunset?" Just sheer, unmitigated uplift, just joy unspeakable and with it health and peace and rest and release from burdens and tensions.³²

³⁰The literal Hebrew meaning is "in the first"—perhaps meaning that both rains will be poured out in the first month, guaranteeing an abundant harvest.

³¹Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," 375.

³²Sherrill, *They Speak with Other Tongues*, 83.

And this:

When I started praying in tongues I felt, and people told me I looked, twenty years younger. . . . I am built up, am given joy, courage, peace, the sense of God's presence; and I happen to be a weak personality who needs this.³³

Those testimonies make a powerful sales pitch for speaking in tongues. If tongues can give health and happiness and make you look younger, the potential market is unlimited.

On the other hand, the evidence to support such claims is dubious. Would anyone seriously argue that today's tongues-speakers live holier, more consistent lives for Christ than believers who do not speak in tongues? What about all the charismatic leaders in recent years whose lives have proved to be morally and spiritually bankrupt? And does the evidence show that charismatic churches are, on the whole, spiritually stronger and more solid than Bible-believing churches that do not advocate the gifts? The truth is, one must look long and diligently to find a charismatic fellowship where spiritual growth and biblical understanding are genuinely the focus. If the movement does not produce more spiritual Christians or believers who are better informed theologically, what fruit is it producing after all? And what of the many former tongues-speakers who testify that they did *not* experience genuine peace, satisfaction, power, and joy until they came out of the tongues movement? Why does the charismatic experience so often culminate in disillusionment as the emotional high from initiatory ecstatic experiences becomes harder and harder to duplicate?

Without question, many people who speak in tongues say they find the practice beneficial to one degree or another. But normally—as in the testimonies cited above—they are speaking of how it makes them *feel* or *look*, not how it helps them be better Christians. Yet improved looks and feelings were never results of the New Testament gift.

It is significant to note that Pentecostals and charismatics cannot substantiate their claim that what they are doing is the biblical gift of tongues. We know of no authentic, proven cases where any Pentecostal or charismatic has actually spoken in an identifiable, translatable language.³⁴ The linguist William Samarin wrote, "It is extremely

³³Ibid.

³⁴Some Charismatics *do* claim they can speak human languages (or that they know others who can), but these claims are nearly always based on little more than hearsay or speculation. Pat Boone, for example, says his wife, Shirley, spoke in Latin when she first received the gift. [Pat Boone, "Baptized in the Holy Spirit," *Charisma* (August 1988), 58.] No tape or independent corroboration of this claim is offered, however, nor have Mrs. Boone's more recent "tongues" been

doubtful that the alleged cases of xenoglossia [real languages] among charismatics are real. Any time one attempts to verify them he finds that the stories have been greatly distorted or that the 'witnesses' turn out to be incompetent or unreliable from a linguistic point of view."³⁵ "Charismatic proponents have given no evidence, other than their assumption, that these are the same phenomena" as the New Testament gift.³⁶

So how can the phenomenon be explained?

A number of possibilities arise. First, *tongues may be satanic or demonic*. Some critics of the movement want to write off all supposed tongues as the work of the devil. While I am not ready to do that, I am convinced that Satan is often the force behind phenomena that pass as gifts of the Spirit. After all, he is behind every false religion (1 Cor. 10:20), and he specializes in counterfeiting truth (2 Cor. 11:13–15). Many in the church these days are susceptible to his lies: "The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).

Former tongues-speaker Ben Byrd believes some of his extraordinary abilities were "psychic and possibly satanic powers":

Many, many times I have walked down ministry lines praying for people with my eyes closed while I prayed with tongues. I was able to function as if my eyes were open. I was aware of everything happening around me, BUT MY EYES WERE CLOSED. I felt as though I were in a strange, but very vivid dream state . . . almost asleep in my body, but very aware and alert in my mind. Functioning through another realm IS POSSIBLE But PLEASE REMEMBER THAT ALL GIFTS ARE NOT FROM GOD.³⁷

Ecstatic speech is common in false religions. Current editions of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* contain helpful articles on glossolalia among pagans in their worship rites. Reports have come from East Africa telling of persons possessed by demons who speak fluently in Swahili or English, although under normal circumstances they would not understand either language. Among the Thonga people of Africa, when a demon is exorcised, a song is usually sung in Zulu even though the Thonga people do not know Zulu. The one doing the in Latin. It would be helpful if tongues-speakers who believe their languages are translatable human dialects would allow those claims to be tested under controlled conditions.

³⁵Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels*, 112–13.

³⁶Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," 372.

³⁷Ben Byrd, *One Pastor's Journey Into and Out of the Charismatic and Faith Movements*, (Columbus, Ga.: Brentwood, 1987), 45 (emphasis in original).

exorcising is supposedly able to speak Zulu by a "miracle of tongues."

Today, ecstatic speech is found among Muslims, Eskimos, and Tibetan monks. A parapsychological laboratory at the University of Virginia Medical School reports incidents of tongues-speaking among those practicing the occult.³⁸

Those are only a few examples of the centuries-old tradition of glossolalia that continues today among pagans, heretics, and worshipers of the occult. The possibility of satanic influence is a serious issue, and one which charismatics ought not brush aside without somber reflection.

Another possibility is that *tongues is a learned behavior*. Most contemporary glossolalia, I am convinced, falls into this category. As we have seen, charismatic leaders like Charles and Frances Hunter hold seminars to *instruct* people about how to receive the gift of tongues. How can that be viewed as anything other than learned behavior? The Hunters jump-start people emotionally by getting them to shout prayers and praise; they suggest sample syllables to prime the pump; and they encourage people to repeat "funny little sounds."³⁹ That's clearly *not* how a spontaneous gift operates. Nor is that kind of tongues-speaking by any stretch of the term a "supernatural" experience. It is not a miracle. It is something almost anyone can learn to do. It is striking that many of the different tongues-speakers use the same terms and sounds. They all speak essentially the same way. Anyone who hears it enough can do it.

In his book *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*, John Kildahl concluded after much study of the evidence that glossolalia is a learned skill.⁴⁰ Kildahl, a clinical psychologist, and his partner Paul Qualben, a psychiatrist, were commissioned by the American Lutheran Church and the National Institute of Mental Health to do a long-range study on tongues. After all their work, they came to the firm conviction that it was nothing more than a "learned phenomenon."⁴¹

A more recent study conducted at Carleton University, Ottawa, demonstrated that virtually anyone can learn to speak in tongues with minimum instruction and modeling. Sixty subjects who had never spoken in tongues or heard anyone else do it were used in an

³⁸Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels*, 254-55. See also Joseph Dillow, *Speaking in Tongues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 172-75.

³⁹Hunter, "Receiving the Baptism," 54.

⁴⁰John Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 74.

⁴¹Ibid.

experiment. After two brief training sessions including audio- and videotaped samples of tongues speaking, all the subjects were asked to attempt to speak glossolalia for thirty seconds. Every subject in the test was able to speak passable glossolalia throughout the thirty-second test, and seventy percent were able to speak fluently.⁴²

A man in our church who used to speak in tongues admitted to me, "I learned to do it. I'll show you." Then he started speaking in tongues. The sounds I heard coming from him were exactly like other tongues I had heard from others. Yet the claim is constantly made that each charismatic is supposed to receive his own "private" prayer language.

I overheard a zealous charismatic trying to teach a new believer to speak in tongues. It struck me as odd that this man felt he needed to labor so industriously to help this baby Christian receive the gift of tongues. Why a person would have to *learn* how to receive a gift from the Holy Spirit is baffling. Nonetheless the charismatic movement is full of people who will gladly "teach" you how to speak in tongues.

While researching for this book, I was watching a charismatic talk show on television. One person confessed to having spiritual problems. Another charismatic said to him, "Have you used your tongue every day? Have you spoken in your language every day?"

"Well, no, I haven't," the person admitted.

To which the other one replied, "Well, that's your problem. You have to get into it every day, and it doesn't matter how it starts. Just get it started and once you get it started, the Holy Spirit will keep it going."

That conversation is revealing on several counts. For one, if the Holy Spirit has given someone the gift of tongues, why does that person have to make an effort to get it started?

Within the charismatic movement, there is great peer pressure to belong, to perform, to have the same gifts and power that everyone else has. The "answer" to spiritual problems is tongues. It is easy to see why tongues has become the great common denominator, the universal test of spirituality, orthodoxy, and maturity for charismatics. But it is a faulty test.

Kildahl and Qualben wrote,

Our study produced conclusive evidence that the benefits reported by tongue-speakers which are subjectively real and continuous are dependent upon acceptance by the leader and other members of the group rather than upon the actual experience of saying the sounds. Whenever

⁴²Nicholas P. Spanos, Wendy P. Cross, Mark Lepage, and Marjorie Coristine, "Glossolalia as Learned Behavior: An Experimental Demonstration," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 95:1 (1987), 21-23.

a tongue-speaker broke off the relationship with the leader of the group, or felt rejected by the group, the experience of glossolalia was no longer so subjectively meaningful.⁴³

They also reported a widespread disillusionment among the subjects of their study. People who spoke in tongues realized instinctively that what they were doing was learned behavior. There was nothing supernatural about it. Soon they found themselves facing the same problems and hangups they had always had. According to Kildahl and Qualben, the more sincere a person was when starting to speak in tongues, the more disillusioned he could be when he stopped.

One more possibility has been suggested: *tongues can be psychologically induced*. Some of the strangest cases of tongues have been explained as psychological aberrations. The tongues-speaker goes into motor automatism, which is clinically described as radical inward detachment from one's conscious surroundings. Motor automatism results in disassociation of nearly all voluntary muscles from conscious control.

Have you ever watched a newscast that showed young teenage girls at a rock concert? In the excitement and the emotion, the fervor and the noise, they literally give up voluntary control of their vocal chords and their muscles. They fall to the floor in a paroxysm.

Most people, at one time or another, experience moments when they feel a little detached, a little woozy, and a little faint. Given the right set of conditions, particularly where there is a great deal of emotional fervor involved, a person can easily slip into a state where he or she is no longer consciously in control. In such a state, glossolalia can be the result.

The condition in which most people sense the euphoria of the tongues experience seems to be closely related to the hypnotic state. Kildahl and Qualben stated from their studies that "hypnotizability constitutes the *sine qua non* of the glossolalia experience. If one can be hypnotized, then one is able under proper conditions to speak in tongues."⁴⁴

After extensive study of tongues-speakers, Kildahl and Qualben concluded that people who were submissive, suggestible, and dependent on a leader were those most likely to speak in tongues.⁴⁵ William Samarin agreed that "people of a certain type are *attracted* to the kind of religion that used tongues."⁴⁶ Obviously, not every tongues-speaker would fit into this category, but many if not most of

⁴³Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*, 55.

⁴⁴Ibid., 54.

⁴⁵Ibid., 38-56.

⁴⁶Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels*, 228.

them do. Watch almost any charismatic program on television. The people in the audiences nod and *amen* everything that is said from the platform, even novel and bizarre teachings. They submit easily to the power of suggestion and do whatever is being suggested. When emotions get high and the pressure mounts, anything might happen.

There is no way to analyze each speaker in tongues and come up with a clear reason for his behavior. But as we saw, there are many possible explanations for the glossolalia among modern charismatics. Dr. E. Mansell Pattison, a member of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, said:

The product of our analysis is the demonstration of the very natural mechanisms which produce glossolalia. As a psychological phenomenon, glossolalia is easy to produce and readily understandable.

I can add my own observations from clinical experiences with neurological and psychiatric patients. In certain types of brain disorders resulting from strokes, brain tumors, etc. the patient is left with disruptions in his automatic, physical speech circuit patterns. If we study these "aphasic" patients we can observe the same decomposition of speech that occurs in glossolalia. Similar decomposition of speech occurs in schizophrenic thought and speech patterns, which is structurally the same as glossolalia.

This data can be understood to demonstrate that the same stereotypes of speech will result whenever conscious, willful control of speech is interfered with, whether by injury to the brain, by psychosis, or by passive renunciation of willful control.⁴⁷

As we have seen, would-be tongues-speakers are often explicitly instructed to enter into "passive renunciation of willful control." They are told to release themselves, give up control of their voice. They are coached to say a few syllables, just to let them flow. They are not to think about what they are saying.

Charles Smith, the late dean of The Master's Seminary, offered an entire chapter of possible explanations for the modern tongues phenomenon. He suggested that tongues can be produced by "motor automatism," "ecstasy," "hypnosis," "psychic catharsis," "collective psyche," or "memory excitation."⁴⁸ The point is that tongues can have many explanations. One cannot escape the conclusion that tongues exist today in many counterfeit forms, apart from the Holy Spirit, just as they did in first-century Corinth.

⁴⁷E. Mansell Pattison, "Speaking in Tongues and About Tongues," *Christian Standard* (February 15, 1964), 2.

⁴⁸Charles R. Smith, *Tongues in Biblical Perspective* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1972), chap. 5.

But Why Are Tongues So Popular?

Christians from every denomination continue to speak in tongues and new people seek the experience every day. Charismatic teachers and writers claim this is the work of the Holy Spirit, that it is a sweeping new burst of power that has come upon the church in the last days.

How can that be? The tongues being spoken today are not biblical. Those who speak in tongues are not practicing the gift described in Scripture. Then why do so many pursue this practice with such fervor? Why do they seek to convince and intimidate others to start doing the same thing? A basic reason is spiritual hunger. People hear that tongues is a way to have a wonderful spiritual experience. They fear that if they have not spoken in tongues, they may be missing something. They want "something more."

Also, many people are hungry to express themselves spiritually. They have been coming to church for years, but they really have not been involved. They have not been recognized as particularly spiritual or holy; and because they hear that tongues-speakers are thought to be holy and spiritual, they try it.

Another basic reason for the growth of tongues is the need for acceptance and security. People need to be in the "in group." They want to be among the ones who "have it," and they cringe at the thought of being among the have-nots who are on the outside looking in. It is very satisfying for some to be in the charismatic movement. It is a form of self-actualization to be able to say, "I am a charismatic." It makes many people feel like they are somebody, like they belong to something, like they have something others do not have.

Another explanation is that the charismatic movement is a reaction to the secularized, mechanized, academic, cold, indifferent society in which we live. The tongues-speaker feels like he or she is directly in touch with the supernatural. Here is something tangible that they can experience. This is not dry and academic. It feels real!

Probably the key reason tongues have exploded on the scene with such force is the need for an alternative to the cold, lifeless Christianity that permeates so many churches. People who join the charismatic movement often are those who are looking for action, excitement, warmth, and love. They want to believe that God is really at work in their lives—right here and now. Dead orthodoxy can never satisfy, and that is why many people look for satisfaction in the charismatic movement.

We can thank God for charismatic and Pentecostal people who believe in the Word of God. We can be grateful that they believe the

Bible and hold it up as authoritative, though we are concerned about their view of revelation. We can also praise God that they believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, his sacrificial death, his physical resurrection, salvation by faith not works, and the need to live in obedience to Christ, fervently love their fellow man, and proclaim the faith with zeal.

Some might say, "Why criticize them?" We do so because it is scriptural to be concerned about whether our brothers and sisters are walking in the truth. Although it may not seem very loving to some, the Bible is clear that we are to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). True love must act on the truth.